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Strategic Warning Staff

Washington, D.C. 20301

9 January 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR THE NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICER FOR WARNING

SUBJECT: The Problem of Strategic Warning and the Continuing Tension in Poland

1. Attached is a short paper prepared by the Strategic Warning Staff that explores some of the implications of the Polish situation for strategic warning of a Soviet intervention. There is some discussion of events of the recent past leading to the present situation but the intention of the authors of the paper was to concentrate on the warning environment of the near future.

2. I understand that NFAC is in the process of producing some kind of paper that will probably cover some of the same subject area. Because of the NFAC project we have no specific plans to publish the attached paper. Nonetheless, we stand ready to publish an updated version of the attached if you think it would satisfy some specific questions not addressed by the NFAC project.

Director, SWS

Attachment

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The Soviets and the Polish Problem

Key Judgements

The Soviets may still invade Poland. The recent falloff in Moscow's apparent readiness to resort to force does not alter the Soviet perception of the basic stakes--party control and security. If massive new strikes break out during the next few weeks, the USSR is unlikely to continue its patience with Kania's fading effort to tame the unions.

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The implications for warning of the present Polish problem are several:

- The internal conditions contributing to Moscow's concern persist.*
- The Soviet and Czech military forces brought to a high state of readiness in early September around the border of Poland continue to be prepared to intervene.*
- Deterioration of the present uneasy but evidently acceptable political situation seems likely.*
- The Polish party will probably not be able to control popular demands for political and economic renewal except with the sustained cooperation of the independent unions and the Church.*
- There is some chance that even the unions and the Church may not be able to stem the tide of popular dissatisfaction with the performance of the Polish government and economy, and that wide-spread disruption may result.*
- The Soviets would probably intervene militarily if they perceived that the Polish party had forfeited its basic authority to non-communist institutions in order to keep popular discontent under control.*
- The Soviets almost certainly would intervene militarily if the Polish regime were unable to maintain public order.*

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It seems clear that Soviet policy is reacting to events in Poland largely beyond its control. It seems equally clear that the Soviets have been at least somewhat reluctant to use military force in Poland, a reluctance perhaps reinforced by a changed view that the cost of an intervention might be higher

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than earlier anticipated. Polish reactions to events of December 1944 have indicated to the Soviets both that stability might still be achieved on Polish terms and that military intervention might encounter far more Polish resistance than would be acceptable. [REDACTED]

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The first indication of a renewed danger of a military intervention would probably come as Moscow tried to respond to actions by the Poles themselves. Specifically important indicators are changes in the relations between the Polish party and the independent organizations, as well as the party's ability to maintain public order in the country. Other important actions to watch include increased political consultation and public criticisms of the deteriorating situation. Changes in the Soviet military posture would probably become evident, the more so as final preparations moved toward completion. [REDACTED]

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DISCUSSION

1. Moscow nearly made its move around early December. The fractured regime in Warsaw at that point appeared unable to guarantee either that the rail system would operate reliably between the USSR and East Germany or that the unions would not achieve significant influence over the security organs. In pursuit of labor peace, the party appeared to be forfeiting authority over crucial political questions, while Poland was failing to meet vital economic commitments to its CEMA partners. [REDACTED]

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2. In this atmosphere, the Soviets accelerated their military activities in and around Poland and suddenly summoned key Warsaw Pact leaders to Moscow for a summit conference. Though the Moscow summit professed confidence in Poland's abilities to solve its own problems while preserving the fundamentals of socialism, it was followed by a period of heightened tension. On 8 December, a TASS dispatch from Poland alleged that the new unions were seeking a nationwide confrontation in pursuit of counterrevolutionary aims. This line was promptly picked up by East German, Czech, and--for the first time--Bulgarian media. [REDACTED]

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10. The intensity of the US and West European response to the possibility of Soviet intervention may also have been unexpected. While harboring no illusions about the current state of relations with Washington, Soviet leaders may well have given new consideration to the cost that a move against Poland would have in terms of relations with the incoming US administration. In any event, it now appears that Kania and his colleagues were given more time to prove that, on the basis of a seeming turn for the better inside the country, they could channel and eventually manipulate the new forces emerging in Poland.

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11. We believe that a new round of massive strikes in Poland, especially if triggered by political rather than economic demands, would convince the Soviets that the limits of tolerance had been breached beyond repair. Moscow would move quickly to restore the broad impression that decisive Soviet actions were imminent, at the same time stepping up pressure on the Polish party to break the unions by force and restore order. A less costly approach might be to engineer still one more change at the top in Poland hoping that criticism of the party, the government, and the economy could

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once more be deflected and the party's prestige and power be restored. Alternatively, the Soviets might encourage the formation of a martial law regime for Poland, with a mandate to break the unions by force while claiming to act only to avert outside intervention.

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12. If such measures failed to turn the tide, the Soviet Union would have virtually no choice but to intervene militarily. The Warsaw regime might indeed call for help, as it has pledged to do if necessary, or the Soviets may claim to have received a "request for fraternal assistance" from "Polish Communists" not included among the current leadership of the Polish United Workers Party. Alternatively, if Poland were in chaos, a large scale military move into Poland would be justified in the Soviet view as necessary to secure major transportation routes and communications facilities deemed vital to Soviet security. The USSR may try again to enlist the cooperation of the Polish military in a joint operation, but the events of the past few weeks suggest they would not again depend on the Poles for significant support. It remains difficult to determine what response the Soviets would expect to the forcible entry of foreign troops into Poland. While ready for anything, Moscow could well be relying on shock and mobility to demoralize the populace while Polish forces either participate or remain in barracks. The possibility of a major Soviet miscalculation regarding the magnitude of Polish popular resistance and its lasting political and economic impact cannot be ruled out.

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13. The invasion option will remain relevant even if the present modus vivendi in Poland endures, given Moscow's intense desire to preserve regional stability elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Even if no new wave of strikes takes place during the next several months, the emergence of a seemingly viable "Polish model" could put the Soviets in an awkward position. If perceived by the USSR as the cause of difficulties elsewhere in the bloc, especially in East Germany, then Poland's apparent success would create new incentives toward stepped up Soviet pressure against Poland. Such pressure could in turn set off new strikes as well as dissident intellectual activity, which the Warsaw authorities might be extremely reluctant to suppress.

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14. Anticipating this possibility, the Soviets will be closely monitoring the impact of their ongoing effort to create trends in their favor in Poland. They will also be watching for Poland's continuing economic difficulties to strain the cohesiveness of the new unions and the position of union leaders. The Polish regimes effort to rebuild its own authority while preparing for a national party congress early next spring will be scrutinized as well, even while outward signs of harmony with Moscow persist. New controversies over censorship, academic freedom, and regular access to the media may be an additional focus of Soviet pressure, especially if Moscow gains the impression that dissident Polish intellectuals can be successfully isolated from the union movement.

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15. The overall situation in Poland remains precarious: Leaving aside the possibility that the Soviets (or the unions) might at some point actually want a confrontation, there is always the chance that a renewed crisis could arise as the result of unexpected events. A runaway strike movement that defies the authority of Walesa and his associates--for example, over the contentious issue of the five-day work week--is only the most apparent of the possibilities. The effects of such developments would be magnified if the popular demands were to take a predominately political cast and threaten the Party's control directly. There is scant evidence at this time of internal political bickering in Moscow over the Polish issue, but such can hardly be ruled out as a possible future complication. A rare combination of dedication to compromise and devotion to declared values on the part of all parties to the conflict would be necessary to keep the threat of Soviet intervention from rising again in the weeks to come.

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